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**GULF SECURITY AND THE IRANIAN THREAT**

**BY**

**COLONEL MATAR JUMA ALNEYADI**

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**GULF SECURITY AND THE IRANIAN THREAT**

by

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## ABSTRACT

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This paper examines the issues of Gulf security and the Iranian threat to the Gulf states. It addresses the relationship between Iran and its Gulf neighbours, the role of Iran in the Gulf security debates, the characteristics and features of a potential military conflict between Iran and the Gulf states, and the Gulf strategy against Iran within the framework of an alliance between the United States and the GCC states.



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# THE GULF SECURITY AND THE IRANIAN THREAT

## INTRODUCTION

Arguably the most volatile region in the world, where global economic interests intersect with regional political pressures, the Gulf region, by virtue of its immense hydrocarbon deposits and the contrasting policies of its constituent states, will continue to figure prominently in the annals of strategic studies and international security analyses. Equally, Iran, considered the linchpin of Western strategy during much of the cold war, will continue to play a pivotal role in Gulf affairs by virtue of its geography, population size, ideology, and regional leadership ambition. Regional and external concerns over Iran appear to be a paragon of sociopolitical development to neighboring countries, in particular the Arab states bordering the Gulf.

The combination of a regional hegemony (Iran), a military aggressor (Iraq), a fragile coalition (the GCC states) and a global hegemony (the US), all converging in the world's most geostrategic area, makes for a charged atmosphere governed by intolerance rather than deference, by self-indulgence rather than mutuality, and by an overriding sense of zero-sum games associated with political maneuvering. On the other hand the policies of the GCC states towards Iran have not been unified. While some of these states have viewed Iranian policy with suspicion, others have enjoyed a more amicable relationship.

In keeping with this outline, this paper examines Gulf Security and the Iranian threat in four sections. The first entitled "The Strategic characteristics of the Gulf Region and the relationship with Iran" introduces relationship between Iran and its Gulf neighbors and two key members of that grouping, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The ongoing dispute between Iran and the UAE over Iran's occupation of the Gulf islands of Abu Musa and the two islands of Tunbs, plus the tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia, present Iran with a set of vexing problems.

Part two adopts the perspective that the Islamic Republic of Iran is generally viewed today by the international community as a major threat to the stability of the Gulf region and examines the role of Iran in the Gulf security debate. Section three deals with characteristics and features of the military conflict between Iran and the Gulf states. It discusses Iranian military resurgence, purchases of conventional military hardware, and Iranian effort to acquire unconventional weaponry.

Section four discusses the Gulf collective security strategy against Iran within the frame of the United States and the GCC member states and the rising importance of the GCC alliance in the formation of security arrangements in the Gulf.

The main problem is how to achieve Arab Gulf security against the Iranian threats in accordance with national security for each of the Gulf countries, regional security as GCC

countries, and national Gulf security as part of the Arab countries.

Peaceful resolution of regional disputes and non-interference in each others internal affairs are confidence-building measures over a long period of time, and a way to overcome the differences which cause instability in the region.

### **THE STRATEGIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GULF REGION AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH IRAN**

The Gulf is extremely important to Iran. The long Iranian coastline (1200 km) occupies all of its northern boundary and is Iran's main window onto the outside world. Iran and the Sultanate of Oman control the strategic Strait of Hormuz, through which Iran exports all of its oil production. Most of Iran's oil industry income accounts for 65 per cent of Iran's annual budget. The oil industry is situated in or near the Gulf, and most of its oil production is exported from ports in the Gulf. There is no denying that Iran is a major Gulf power with legitimate interests and concerns.

The psychological environment plays a major role in determining Iranian policy towards the gulf region. Many in Iranian circles believe that the natural state of affairs in the Gulf is one where Tehran is the principal power. As a result, Iranians feel that the lengthy British presence in the area

denied them their rightful place for a long period of time. These perceptions, which are influenced by historical interactions, continue to affect Tehran's policy towards its Arab neighbors. The major indication here is the belief that Iran must continue to play the role of the primary Gulf power. This was amply demonstrated in the occupation of the Tunb Islands in 1971, by the military interference in Oman's Dhofar region to subdue the Marxist rebellion, and in the clashes with Iraq prior to the signing of the 1975 Algiers' accord.<sup>1</sup>

In the Gulf, three powers with regional ambitions emerge: Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. The other states, as a result of their smaller size, cannot seek an ambitious political role. Iran and Iraq have undergone years of competition, mutual interference, and in the Iran-Iraq war, one of the most devastating wars in the area. Tehran views Saudi Arabia with suspicion due to long standing theological differences. It is a complex relationship between one regime seeking to change the status quo and another seeking defend it. Additional conflicts involve oil production and prices. Iran further considers the creation of the GCC in 1981 as an extension of Saudi influence over the other Gulf states. Although political reasons were responsible to a large extent, economic considerations contributed to the friction. The fact that the sparsely populated GCC states control huge oil reserves will create an even less amicable atmosphere in the future.

## IRAN NATIONAL SECURITY AND GULF SECURITY

Future Iranian policy towards the Gulf will be determined, or at least influenced, by various internal and regional factors. Three of these factors are the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new conditions in Central Asia, and security arrangements in the Gulf.

The collapse and break up of the Soviet Union, following the unsuccessful coup of August 1991, caused a major strategic change in Iran's regional outlook. Following centuries of fear from its northern neighbor, Iran now finds that it no longer has any border with an expansionist state. Instead, its northern borders are now shared with weak new states - Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. As a result, Iran not only feels more secure, but also believes that its diplomacy can influence the northern region in a way that was not possible before.

As a result of the second Gulf war, Iran achieved several strategic goals. The most important is the acceptance of the Algiers Agreement by Iraq and, as a result, the two countries returned to the 1980 status quo. Furthermore, Iran's neutral position in the second Gulf war helped to ease its international isolation, while on the regional front, Iraq's military defeat augmented Iran's relative power.<sup>2</sup>

With the end of Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, the GCC states renewed their search for a security formula that would be both effective and politically sensitive to their requirements. It was clear that the Gulf states did not possess the necessary capability to defend themselves. At the same time, they could not depend on the large network of Arab contacts built over the past three decades. An Arab solution to the security dilemma was not forthcoming.

The need for Western assistance in formulating an effective security arrangement was very clear. The Gulf states thought to purchase sophisticated weapons systems and, at the same time, planned to organize and increase the size of their military. The previous rejection of a Western presence in the area was substituted by a realization that only such a presence could guarantee the Gulf's security.

At the height of this significant debate over future security arrangements in the Gulf, Iran was on the periphery. This was a very uncomfortable position for the Iranian regime to be in, and the clerical leadership was anxious to influence the course of the debate. Yet the West and GCC states did not trust Iranian intentions in spite of its neutral stance in the war. The list of Iran's previous adventures was too long for the GCC states to ignore. For over a decade Iranian activity seriously undermined the stability of many of the GCC states. Iran, meanwhile, continued to preach its traditional strategy of

excluding foreign presence from the Gulf, insisting that Gulf security is the responsibility of the littoral powers. Iran realized that although a Western presence will not threaten the position of the region's smaller states, it will challenge its role as the major regional power by virtue of its size and population.

There are cogent arguments by different viewers as to whether or not Iran constitutes a growing conventional military threat to the Gulf states and their ally, the United States. The Iranian effort to export its Islamic revolution also belongs in any discussion of the Iranian threat, though these are not strictly military operations. Many Western military analysts believe that Iran is trying to attain a capability to control the Gulf or, at the very least, to deny the Gulf to hostile forces. Iranian objectives presumably include the capability to attack and cripple commercial shipping. The major elements of Iran's military modernization program appear to correspond to its political and military objectives.<sup>3</sup>

## **CHARACTERISTICS AND FEATURES OF THE MILITARY CONFLICT BETWEEN IRAN AND THE GULF**

Iran's military structure is very unlike that of other countries. Other nations, including Saudi Arabia, have divided

militaries, but the Revolutionary Guard makes Iran unique because of the many functions it performs. The Guard is a military and an internal security force, but is also an exporter of the revolutionary forces, which pose direct threat to the Gulf states.

The Islamic front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB) is a radical Islamic group backed by the Guard. The Guard and its radical allies could try to rebuild the organization into a major opposition force in Bahrain. Such an action could come in conjunction with decision to revive Iran's claim to Bahrain as some radical Iranian newspapers have suggested. In Kuwait, Iran's revolutionary surrogates came closer to success than they did in Bahrain through the Dawa Party members who attacked and bombed Kuwaiti installations as well as the US and French embassies in Kuwait City. In May 1985 Dawa activists nearly succeeded in killing the Amir of Kuwait. Iran also retains some influence among opposition Shiite Islamic groups in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The Guard has used the vehicle of the annual Haj to strike the Saudi regime regularly.

### **THE GULF STRATEGY AGAINST IRAN**

The future course of Iranian-Arab relations in the Gulf represents a major conundrum. The manner in which many of the states at the region will deal with Tehran will be largely

influenced by Iran's dealings with these regimes. The Iranian Republic is the largest of the Gulf states, and it is a significant factor in the future direction of inter-Gulf relations. Prospects for improving relations, however, do not seem very bright in view of Iran's fluid politics and search for a regional role. Tehran, through its shifting position and contradictory official statements, has not been able to alleviate suspicion in the area. Historical experiences, including the Shah's imperial policies and control of Abu Musa, consolidate the fear of an Iranian hegemonic role. Despite the political tensions, trade and cultural links between Iran and the UAE remain significant. An important trading partner of Iran has been and continues to be Dubai. Notwithstanding the dispute over the Islands, UAE and Iran have maintained good relations in the past. The main impediment now to normalizing Iranian relations with the UAE remains the issue of the three islands, Abu Musa and the two Tunbs. Furthermore, this dispute complicates Iranian relations with other Gulf states.

Iran is rebuilding and expanding its military industries. It may be spending the equivalent of \$200 - \$300 million a year to manufacture conventional arms in Iran and as much or more on missiles and weapons of mass destruction.<sup>4</sup> Iran's current military capabilities are heavily influenced by its demographics. It is by far the most heavily populated Gulf state, with a population of about 66 millions and a high birth rate. This

gives it a major potential advantage in building up its military forces. At the same time, Iran manpower base has deep ethnic divisions, and its ability to transform its manpower number into military power is severely limited by Iran's economic problems and access to arms imports.

There is no way to predict Iran long term behavior, but it is likely to remain sufficiently weak in the near to mid term so that it will be deterred by the risks of initiating a major regional conflict, or escalating to one if a more limited struggle begins. It is impossible to dismiss the risk of such a war, but Iran seems far more likely to use force, or to threaten to use force in spite of its military weaknesses, in a wide range or lesser contingencies. These contingencies include:

1. Intervention in a civil war or a military upheaval in Iraq involving religious issues.
2. A military response to Iraqi incursions into Iran.
3. Intervention in a Kurdish uprising in Iraq, suppression of a Kurdish uprising in Iran, or a military response to the rights of shipping lanes.
4. Use of force to assert Iran claims to off shore gas fields claimed by Qatar.
5. A major clash between Israel and the palestinians and/or Syria after the failure of the peace settlement.

6. Attack on US citizens or forces to try to eliminate the US presence in the Gulf.

7. A military response to a crisis over the transfer of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons material and technology to Iran.

It should be noted that many of these scenarios are not necessarily aggressive and could involve conflicts over what may be considered to be legitimate Iranian national interests. At the same time, they illustrate a wide range of potential risks, and every one of the above conflicts involves major uncertainties as to the exact mix of the forces that Iran would threaten to commit or actually commit and the intensity of the conflicts and escalation that might follow.

This range of contingencies would also change radically if Iran and Iraq would ever cooperate. While there is a little present prospect that Iran and Iraq would join together, regimes changes and sometimes do so suddenly and with unpredictable motives. Any serious Iranian and Iraqi cooperation in using military force would rapidly alter the military balance in the Gulf, and a combination of Iranian and Iraq military forces could put far more military pressure on any combination of Western and Allied Gulf forces.

## THE IRANIAN ARMY

Iran's land forces have been in a constant state of change since the end of the Iran-Iraq war, and it is difficult to make accurate estimates of their strength. Its army and Revolutionary Guard units have suffered from the combined impact of revolution, a Western embargo on arms transfers, and the Iran-Iraq war. Its ground forces also took far greater losses during the Iran-Iraq war than did the Iranian air force or navy, particularly during the final battles. Its defeats in land battles during 1988 were so severe that they led to the disintegration of some elements of the Pasdaran and even Iran's main regular army units. These defeats also caused massive losses of weapons and equipment.

While Iran's exact losses are in dispute, it is clear that it lost over half of its operational armor between February and July 1988. Iraq seems to be correct in claiming to have captured large amounts of war materials of all types from Iran. The degree of disintegration in Iran's land forces at the end of the Iran-Iraq war is reflected in the fact that much of this captured equipment showed no sign of combat damage or wear. Much was abandoned in the field, either out of panic or because of supply problems. Iran has, however, rebuilt some of these capabilities.

Estimates of the current equipment holdings of Iran's land forces are uncertain, and it is not possible to distinguish the holdings of the Iranian regular army from those of the Islamic

Revolutionary Guard Corps. Iran does, however, seem to have had an inventory of around 1,245 tanks in early 1994 - reflecting a rise from some 200 tanks over 1993 and 320-380 tanks over 1992. While Iran's total inventory is up to over 1,500 tanks, some experts rate Iran's sustainable operational tank strength at still only about 900-1000 tanks.

There is as yet no evidence that Iran can manufacture the advanced armor, fire control, engines, suspensions, or guns for a first-line main battle tank. As a result, Iran is now dependent on its holdings of the export version of the Russian T-72M for anything approaching an advanced tank. The T-72M performed badly in Iraqi hands during the Gulf war, and lacks the terminal sights, night-vision systems, fire-control systems, and advanced armor to compete with first-line Western tanks like the M-1A1/2, Challenger, Le Clerc, or Leopard 2. Iran also only has about 250-350 T-72s, and a substantial number of its M-47s, M-60s, and Chieftains are probably not operational.

Iran bought large numbers of mortars during the Iran-Iraq war, for the same reason that it bought large numbers of towed tube artillery weapons. These artillery weapons give Iran considerable ability to mass fires against relatively static area targets, but towed artillery is an anachronism in modern maneuver warfare operations, and Iran has only limited artillery fire-control and battle management systems, counter-battery radar capability, and long-range target acquisition capability. Iran

has actively sought more modern fire-control and targeting systems since the mid-1980s, but it is unclear how many it obtained or put into service.

## ISLAMIC REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS CORPS

There are significant uncertainties regarding the organization and role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). Most sources agree that the IRGC was organized into eleven internal security regions in 1994. Some sources indicate that they were organized into 12-15 "divisions," although most such divisions had manning levels less than those of brigades in the Iranian regular army, and many had less firepower than Western combat battalions. It also had some 18-23 independent "brigades" - including armored, infantry, special forces, paratroops, air defense, artillery, missile, engineer, and border defense units. These brigades manning levels are equivalent to regiments and battalions in the regular forces.

Most sources feel that the IRGC land forces will be kept as largely infantry forces, rather than be upgraded into full armored and mechanized forces, and that the Iranian regular army is getting most of Iran's new heavy weapons. Given the political power of the IRGC, it seems doubtful that it will be restricted to the role of an internal security force - and it seems likely that it will compete with the army for some heavy equipment - but

it is far from clear that it will change its current focus on unconventional warfare and light forces.

The split between the Iranian regular army and the IRGC helps prevent Iran from concentrating its total mix of land forces into standardized, well-manned and equipped, and well-trained land units that can conduct effective armored maneuvers or combined arms operations. While Iran's more recent exercises seem to be part of an effort to correct this situation, they seem to be making limited progress at best and usually seem designed more to intimidate the southern states of the Gulf and Iraq than to improve military effectiveness.

Improvements are needed in many areas, in arms as well as personnel. In fact, all of Iran's land force equipment holdings must be modernized or reconditioned to recover from the combined impact of a cut-off of Western weapons and equipment, the wear of eight years of war, and the massive losses of 1988. It needs improved tank and artillery rounds, remotely piloted vehicles (RPVs) that are integrated into division or brigade level operations, improved mobile short-range air defense systems (SHORADS) and man-portable air-to-surface missiles, tank transporters, secure communications, night vision and improved sights, modern fire-control systems, and tracked support equipment. It would greatly benefit from advanced training and simulation technology.

The Iranian regular army almost certainly understands all of these requirements. It has learned from the Iran-Iraq war and the Gulf war that a reliance on mass, rather than quality, is ineffective. It has sought to give its existing unit strength more armor and artillery, to strengthen the firepower and mobility of selected specialized independent brigades, and to give its infantry divisions added artillery strength and armored infantry fighting vehicles. Even so, it appears that it will be beyond the year 2000 before Iran's land forces can acquire anything like the full mix of modern equipment they need.

Iran's high command remains divided, and its logistic system is compartmented and ineffective. Many combat units have low overall manpower strength, and some units lack the manpower and equipment to be employed in anything other than static defensive battles. Logistics, combat engineering, and support capabilities are limited and dependent on reinforcement from the civil sector for any sustained operations.

The IRGC land forces have many defects. The IRGC is poorly organized and trained for conventional war fighting, it is relatively lightly equipped, and its ideology is a poor substitute for proper equipment, discipline, standardization, and coherent organization. Iran's land forces clearly lack the capability to sustain large-scale armored thrusts deep into the territory of a well-armed regional power like Iraq, and are not capable of significant amphibious operations in the face of

opposition by a power like the United States. Iran is just beginning to acquire significant offensive and power projection capabilities, and could do little more than exploit an Iraqi civil war, or rush battalion-sized forces to support some coup attempt in an exposed country like Bahrain.<sup>5</sup>

Iranian land forces could support the seizure of islands and off-shore oil facilities in the Gulf, defeat any Kurdish uprising, and play a significant role in low-intensity combat in Iran's northern and eastern border areas. Iranian army forces are also capable of intervening at the brigade and division level in a conflict like the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and could easily defeat the Iranian Kurds or any other internal opposition force. Iranian land forces, particularly the IRGC, can and do play a significant role in training, equipping, and supporting guerrilla and terrorist forces in countries like Lebanon and the Sudan - and possibly Bosnia. They can covertly project power in terms of supporting radical or extremist movements in other states.

#### **THE IRANIAN AIR FORCE**

Iran's air force has gone through a decade and a half of revolution and war, and its current operational strength is limited. While Iran had 85,000 men and 447 combat aircraft in its air force at the time the Shah fell from power, it steadily lost

air strength from 1980 to 1988. The air force suffered combat losses in the Iran-Iraq war, and has long been cut off from its US suppliers. It has lacked effective foreign technical support for fifteen years, and has been purged of some of the pilots that served under the Shah, and of many other officers and technical personnel.

However, Iran's purchase of Soviet aircraft has the major benefit of enabling the Iranian air force to use some of the Soviet-built Iraqi aircraft that fled to Iran during the Gulf war. There is some question about the exact number of aircraft involved, and how many are flyable. Some sources report as few as 106 combat aircraft, but Iraq has officially claimed that they total 139 aircraft. Iran has already begun to fly Iraqi MiG-29a and Su-24s, and is in the process of absorbing all of Iraq's flyable . This could give Iran up to 90 additional combat aircraft if it can obtain suitable support from Russia. Iran probably cannot operate Iraqi Mirage F-1s effectively without French technical assistance, which currently seems highly unlikely.

It is clear from Iran's aircraft acquisitions that it is seeking to obtain first-line air defense and long-range strike fighters and to rebuild a high-technology air force that can provide both effective air defense and the ability to strike deep into Iraq, the southern Gulf states, and any other neighboring power. If Iran can obtain additional imports of 50-100 first-

line combat aircraft, it may be able to achieve near parity with a decaying Iraqi air force by the year 2000, *if* Iraq continues to face an embargo on all shipments of aircraft, parts and air munitions. However, Iran has only a limited current prospect of keeping its US-supplied aircraft operational much beyond the late 1990s, and may find it difficult to convert to Russian fighters quickly enough to offset its losses of US types.

At some point in the near future, Iran must also make a clear decision between trying to maintain a hybrid air force and standardizing on Russian aircraft. Continued reliance on aging US aircraft presents obvious risks, and there are no near-term prospects that the United States will relax its constraints on parts and new equipment. Such an air force would take 5-8 years to create, however, and would be extremely costly. Iran also faces the risk of creating new supply problems with Russia, and Russia has so far failed to provide any Third World state with effective advanced air combat and air-to-ground training, and the associated equipment, training, and technical support to fight effectively as a coherent modern air force.

This mix of strengths and weaknesses is likely to leave the Iranian air force with limited to moderate war-fighting capability, but this capability can scarcely be disregarded. Iran has steadily improved its air combat and exercise training since the end of the Gulf war and has conducted combined operations exercises with the land forces, land-based air defense

forces, and naval forces. It can now conduct limited air attacks against all of its neighbors, and can deliver precision-guided weapons, chemical weapons, and possibly biological weapons.

#### **IRANIAN GROUND-BASED AIR DEFENSES**

Iranian ground-based air defenses play a critical role in shaping Iranian willingness to take risks and use conventional military forces. As long as Iran is vulnerable to the kind of air offensive that the UN coalition conducted against Iraq during Desert Storm, it is likely to be restrained in the risks it will take. Much depends, however, on how Iran perceives its vulnerability to air attack and the attrition levels it can inflict on attacking aircraft. This perception will be shaped in part by Iran's ability to modernize its fighter forces, but Iran has no near-term prospect of acquiring an airborne defense platform similar to the E-3 AWACS operated by the Saudi and US air forces, or matching the West in airborne electronic warfare capabilities. Its success in modernizing its ground-based air defenses will, therefore, probably be as important in influencing its willingness to take military risks as its acquisition of aircraft.

Iran faces serious problems in upgrading to a modern air defense system, most of which dates back to the time of the Shah. Although it bought modern surface-to-air missiles at the time of

the Shah, it never integrated these missiles into an effective land-based air defense system. It had made its air control and warning system fully operational, and had experienced serious problems in operating some of its largely British-supplied radars. Once the Shah was deposed, Iran had no way of purchasing the equipment needed to improve or properly maintain its Western-supplied radars, communications system, and software. It also lost many of its Western-trained operators, technicians, and commanders during the purges following the revolution, and this reduced its ability to use its Western-supplied equipment effectively.

Iran has responded by obtaining the SA-2, CSA-1, SA-6, and SA-S from the PRC, Russia, and Central Europe.<sup>6</sup> These transfers of surface-to-air missiles and sensors from Russia and the PRC have helped improve Iran's land-based capabilities, but they have not been adequate to meet its needs. They give Iran improved capability against regional air forces without sophisticated jammers and anti-radiation missiles, but they do not give it a modern integrated air defense system that can resist attack by a power like the United States.

Even the latest versions of the Improved Hawk do not approach the Patriot in performance capability, and the Improved Hawks in Iranian hands are nearly 17 years old. If Iran is to create the land-based elements of an air defense system capable of dealing with the retaliatory capabilities of the US air

forces, it needs a modern heavy surface-to-air missile system that is a part of an integrated air defense system. Such a system may not be easy to obtain. No European or Asian power can currently sell Iran either an advanced ground-based air defense system, or an advanced heavy surface-to-air missile system. The United States and Russia are the only current suppliers of such systems, and the only surface-to-air missiles that can meet Iran's needs are the Patriot, SA-10, SA-12a, and SA-12b.

It would also take at least three to five years fully to deploy and integrate such a system once Russia agreed to the sale. Its effectiveness would also depend on the ability of Russia to provide suitable technical training and to adapt a Russian system to the specific topographical and operating conditions of Iran. An advanced land-based Russian air defense system would, however, give Iran far more capability to defend against retaliatory raids from Iraq or any other Arab Gulf air force. It would allow Iran to allocate more fighter/attack aircraft to attack missions and use its interceptors to provide air cover for such attack missions. It would greatly complicate the problem of using offensive US air power against Iran, require substantially more US forces to conduct a successful air campaign, and probably greatly increase US losses.

## THE IRANIAN NAVY

Most Gulf nations have treated seapower as an afterthought, but the Iranian navy and naval branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps are likely to play a critical role in Iranian military action in the Gulf. Any Iranian intervention in a Gulf state that does not involve the cooperation of an Arab Gulf government, and free access to ports and air fields, would require some kind of amphibious operation. Naval forces are equally essential to a wide spectrum of other possible conflicts that affect the islands in the Gulf. These include the control of the Straits of Hormuz, unconventional warfare using naval forces, attacks on coastal targets in Iraq and the southern Gulf, and Western and Gulf Arab naval operations in the Gulf.

As a result, it is scarcely surprising that Iran has given the modernization of its naval forces a high priority since the end of the Iran-Iraq war. It has obtained missiles from the Chinese, some additional ships, midget submarines from North Korea, submarines from Russia, and significant logistic and technical support from Pakistan. It has improved its naval training, acquired additional mine-warfare capability, and repaired some of its ships.

While most Iranian major surface ships have limited operational capability; the combat strength of the Iranian navy was impressive by Gulf standards. According to various

estimates, Iran's operational inventory included 2 destroyers, 3 frigates, 10 missile combatants, 33 light patrol and coastal combatants, 5 mine-warfare ships , 9 armed helicopters, 8 amphibious ships and craft. It had a small marine force and large numbers of naval revolutionary guards. It also had 5-7 Silkworm (HY-2) anti-ship missile sites to defend its ports and cover the Straits of Hormuz.

Most of the regular navy is based at Bandar Abbas, the only large Iranian port far enough away from Iraq to be relatively secure from Iraqi air attack during the Iran-Iraq war. This port is the home port of Iran's destroyers, frigates, and two Kilo-class submarines. Iran does not conduct extensive patrols in the Gulf of Oman, but it does hold occasional exercises there, and is expanding its base at Chah Bahar in the Gulf of Oman. It has another large naval base at Bushehr, where it deploys most of its guided missile patrol boats.

## CONCLUSIONS

With the end of the second Gulf war Iran commenced its attempts to consolidate its regional role in the Gulf. The Iranian leadership felt that the moment was favorable to regain what is viewed as its rightful place in the region.

The changing regional environment is certainly more conducive to an increasing Iranian role in the Gulf. These changes include the defeat of Iraq and the dramatic collapse of

the Soviet Union, which created a less threatening environment for Iran on its northern borders, will allow Tehran to devote more energy and resources to its southern arena.

Iranian ambitions, however, face a series of formidable challenges. These challenges include the political and military presence of the West in the Gulf, the distrust of Iranian intentions by the countries of the area, difficult economic conditions, and an unstable internal political climate.

Iranian relations with the UAE demonstrate the complexity and multidimensional aspects of Arab - Persian interregional relationships. On the one hand, the connection includes established cultural and social ties as well as active and substantial trading links. On the other hand, the relationship faces mutual mistrust and misperception. In the case of Iran and the UAE, the islands issue constitutes the major obstacle to a complete normalization of relations.

Many studies have noted Iranian military resurgence with alarm. One explanation for the weapons resurgence is that the present Iranian leadership is preparing to assert military superiority over one of several of the GCC states. While it is necessary and prudent to train and equip the GCC forces for conventional and unconventional defense in light of the increased military capabilities of the Iranian republic, present-day Iran is unlikely to attack GCC states with overt and attributable

military force, so as not to generate a response against Iran from the GCC and Western coalition.

Without GCC countries' cooperation with each other and with its Western allies, the Gulf can not be protected from major threats. Yet pushing such cooperation too far and too fast runs the risk of overloading the delicate political system and could play into the hands of those who bitterly oppose the GCC governments, including opposition groups within these nations.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The security policy of GCC states must be structured to accommodate the contradictions in Iranian security policy. The quest for Gulf security is unlikely to succeed without a concerted attempt to harmonize relation among all Gulf states. While the GCC grouping has been a step in the right direction, it should be promoted into closer military cooperation among GCC members.
2. The Western countries must take every possible action to limit Iran and Iraq present and future war fighting options, and that such action must take place in four areas: arms control, limits on the transfer of technology and equipment, strengthening the deterrent and defensive capabilities of Arab Gulf forces, and building up Western power projection capabilities.

3. A partnership between the West and the Gulf is the key to the continued deterrence for any Iranian adventures.
4. Western support by selective arms to build up the defense capability of the Gulf states of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.
5. Rebuilding and expanding the GCC military industry to manufacture conventional arms.
6. The policies of the GCC states towards Iran must be unified regardless of their geostrategic considerations and security priorities.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Anwar Grgash, "Iran, the GCC States, and the UAE: Prospects and Challenges in the Coming Decade", in Iran and the Gulf, A Search For Stability, ed. Jamal S. Al- Suwadi( The Emirares Center for Strategic Studies and Research ),138.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.,142.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Katzman, " The Politico - Military Threat From Iran" in Iran and the Gulf, A Search For Stability, ed. Jamal S. Al- Suwadi( The Emirares Center for Strategic Studies and Research) ,198.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.,233.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, " threats and Non- Threats From Iran" in Iran and the Gulf, A Search For Stability, ed. Jamal S. Al- Suwadi( The Emirares Center for Strategic Studies and Research) ,240.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,250.



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